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Weinberger Calls President's Attempt To Change Iran's Policies 'Well Justified'

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Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger said yesterday that President Reagan's efforts to change the policies of the Iranian government were "well justified," distancing himself from Secretary of State George P. Shultz's outspoken criticism of Reagan's program of arms shipments to Tehran.

Weinberger, asked if he endorsed the president's actions, replied, "What we've been talking [about] right along is an attempt to change the policies of Iran, which we are all agreed have been extremely destructive in every way. Any attempt to try to change those policies, I think, can be well justified."

Both Weinberger and Shultz opposed Reagan's secret diplomatic overtures to Tehran when they discussed the plan with the president last January, according to sources.

In June 1985, according to informed sources, Weinberger scribbled "This is absurd" on a top-secret Central Intelligence Agency memorandum recommending that the United States ease its worldwide arms embargo against Iran and encourage some allies to sell selected military equipment to Tehran to cultivate closer ties with certain government factions.

Shultz has publicly repeated his opposition to Reagan's covert plan in recent days. Weinberger, however, chose to avoid the issue until he addressed reporters at a briefing yesterday in Charleston, W.Va., where he spoke at a military computer technology seminar.

Asked how the Reagan administration could espouse a tough policy on terrorism while secretly dealing with Iran, which has supported terrorism, Weinberger said, "We are obviously hoping that there will be a different group of people or a group of people with different ideas . . . so that the policy would change.

"We don't have any interest whatever in keeping the policy of a country terroristic," he said.

"It is certainly understandable that the president would want to do what he could to try to change those policies," he said. "Now if that doesn't succeed, why then, obviously, we'll not pursue it."

Weinberger said he learned of the Iranian arms deal "somewhere at the beginning of this year" and discussed it with the president "when the proposal was made and later."